

references in the story, whether consensual or coerced, such episodes suggest the book is perhaps not an advisable undertaking for very young readers.

Given the variations which exist within the Clytemnestra myth, Classicists might anticipate predictability. Adhering to Aeschylus' version of the myth whereby Clytemnestra's first husband, Tantalus, and their infant son, are slain by Agamemnon drags Clytemnestra's *raison d'être* to the fore. There are, however, a couple of notable deviations from Aeschylus. Clytemnestra herself notices the fires of Troy at the war's end, and it is not Clytemnestra who slays Cassandra. Surprisingly, Clytemnestra pities the woman and wants her to live, adding a final layer of humanity to this otherwise 'monstrous' protagonist. For an expert in the myth, there is much dramatic irony to be enjoyed, especially in the death of Iphigenia at the end of Part 3, and the advent of Electra's disdain for her mother towards the book's end.

On occasion, Casati makes use of significant temporal lapses in her narrative: a fifteen-year one and a nine-year one, after which we tend not to see any glaring ideological or emotional shifts in Clytemnestra or those around her. Whilst key changes to the narrative are detailed after such interims (primarily births and deaths within the households), one does wonder whether there is a missed opportunity here for additional character development, or conversely, an exploration as to why her psyche remains unchanged. However, this detail is not by any means to the detriment of the plot, and in Casati's defence, covering the scope of the Clytemnestra myth would not have been feasible without such jumps.

For *Clytemnestra* to be Casati's first 'Classical' publication is no doubt a sign of great things to come, with its lively pace and gradual plot-twists making it a veritably easy read. The greatest triumph of the book is perhaps its accessibility to the less familiar reader, which will no doubt lead to the emergence of some new mythology enthusiasts. Yet whether approaching the story with a rudimentary or a comprehensive understanding of the myth, there is much to be enjoyed here. Casati's simultaneous tenderness yet avoidance of overstated sentimentality creates a Clytemnestra an audience cannot help but respect in some facet. Whether for her ambition, rejection of binary gender expectations or her Spartan military skill, this reworking is one which no doubt succeeds in its aim of proving that perhaps we are not as well-acquainted with the complexity of Clytemnestra as we thought.

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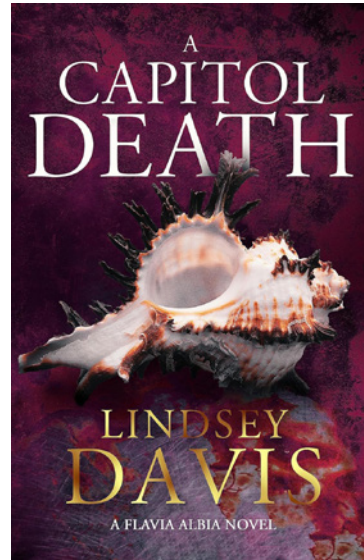
A Capitol Death

Davis (L.), Pp. 383, map. London:
Hodder & Stoughton, 2019. Cased, £20.
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Some people believe that historical novels are a poor substitute for reading 'proper' history. I am not someone who subscribes to this view and have always actively encouraged my students to engage



daughter of Falco, now a grown woman and private investigator in her own right.

Davis' books are always well researched and offer the reader an excellent insight into life in Imperial Rome. Flavia Albia works during the reign of the sinister Emperor Domitian, a period which the author has explored elsewhere in a standalone novel *Master and God*. For engaged students such works are a great starting point, hopefully encouraging further interest and historical inquiry. What I especially enjoyed about this instalment was that the story is set during the days leading up to Domitian's double triumph of 89 AD. Although there are questions over the actual logistics of such an event, Davis gives a colourful and inventive interpretation of how preparations might have proceeded. There is consideration of fun questions such as how the triumphing Emperor might be able to relieve himself during the long procession and how numerous foreign prisoners might have been 'found' in Rome, given the very real fact that Domitian's military victory was, at best, questionable. As usual, Davis has an irreverent approach to the figures of authority and the readers find themselves cheering for the underdogs in the story.

The plot of this book is that a murder has taken place and Flavia Albia is tasked with investigating it. Specifically, an imperial official has been flung from the Tarpeian Rock, in a parody of the ancient punishment for traitors. Much of the action takes place on the eponymous Capitol and a handy map of this area has been provided to help the reader make sense of the geography of the main storyline. This is a book which took me a while to read as I often became interested in a little fact which had been dropped in and I was curious enough to go away and research it. Flavia Albia is a good protagonist as she is, effectively, an outsider within Roman society herself as she was originally a British orphan, adopted and schooled into polite society by the Didii. This makes her explanation to the reader of certain features of Roman life seem more authentic- something that many historical novels struggle to achieve.

As usual with Davis' novels, there is a riotous cast of eccentric characters. It would be difficult to keep control of these, but for a cast list at the beginning of the book, which I found myself flipping back to regularly. The pace of the book is snappy and there is a good amount of action including a second murder, some humorous scenes involving Juno's Sacred Geese and even an insight into the production of imperial purple cloth. Certainly, there must be some

suspension of belief: it seems unlikely that women in Rome genuinely had the freedom afforded to the heroine of the story. However, this is why Davis' books have been popular for so long: they have clever storylines, likeable characters and interesting yet obviously despicable villains. This is cosy crime at its best and can be enjoyed after a long day of more serious academic pursuits.

However, this book will undoubtedly leave you with questions about minor logistics which you will feel compelled to investigate after finishing it. I enjoyed this immensely and look forward to reading the next few in the series.

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